

## **My Girl** by **halfbloodjames**

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**Summary:**

El gets ready for the Snow Ball: a short drabble

## My Girl

The small cabin no longer seemed like a prison to El, now littered with homework the boys and Max brought over everyday after school, the books Jonathan brought from the library, or the clothes Nancy got for her in place of the flannels and overalls (“Hop, she’s a thirteen year old girl, not a farmer,” she had said). Even Steve had provided a Betamax and tapes so that she could beef up on her pop culture knowledge. El may still have to be hidden for a while longer but the cabin which had once been her hiding place was now constantly buzzing with visitors.

But as soon as Hop and Joyce had informed El she would be going to the Snow Ball that night, Hop felt as if he would have to handcuff her to the table until they were ready to leave. Joyce seemed to enjoy El’s constant barrage of questions about how school dances worked and what was to be expected.

“It’s going to be dark?” El asked, clearly concerned. “How will I see?”

Joyce laughed as she applied the hot pink eye shadow to El’s face. “Not completely dark, sweetie. Just... dim. It’s very romantic.”

“Not too romantic,” Hop said, watching from behind Joyce with his arms crossed. “You’re too young for romance. Remember that.”

Joyce winked at El, who smiled brightly. Hop rolled his eyes but a smile played on his lips as well. He enjoyed when Joyce would come over and play mom to El. He knew Joyce enjoyed it too; she had quite the time picking out a dress and was more than willing to help El get ready for the dance.

“All right, all set, take a look,” Joyce said, squeezing El’s shoulder. She held the small hand mirror up to her face, her fingers ghosting across her cheeks.

“I look so pretty,” El said, her voice light and amazed. Joyce touched her hair lightly.

“Oh, sweetie, you’re always pretty.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Hop said, feigning annoyance but the grin gave him away. “We’re gonna be late, kid.”

Joyce gave El a last hug and a quick hair tuck to make sure everything was in place before she left to take Will to the dance. Hop helped El put on her winter coat, an old dark blue one with a faded Hawkins PD patch that had once been Hop’s that El had refused to let Nancy get rid of despite it hanging down well past her knees. Hop had told her she looked like a penguin but that only made her like the coat more.

“Ready, El?” Hop asked.

“Ready,” El nodded.

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The entire way to the school, El was nearly bouncing out of her seat, but as soon as they pulled into the parking lot, she froze up. She stared up at the lights coming up through the gym windows. It may have just been a middle school dance, but to El, it was the most normal thing she had ever been to, making it the most important.

“You good, kid?” Hop asked, parking in a spot not too far off from the door so he could see everyone that came in and out of the gym. He planned on staying in the same spot until Eleven came back out.

“Scared,” She said shortly.

“Come on, give me more than that,” He pried.

“I don’t know how to dance,” El said. “I look different. Mike doesn’t know I’m here.”

“You’ve got nothing to worry about. None of those kids know how to dance either. And if you’re worried Mike isn’t gonna be happy to see you here, you haven’t been paying attention. That kid is gonna crap his pants. In the best way,” Hop laughed, shaking his head.

“Yeah?” El asked.

“Yeah,” Hop confirmed. “And you look gorgeous, kid.”

“I do?”

“Definitely,” Hop held her head with his hand, rubbing his thumb over her cheek. “But, I know what would make this whole look perfect.”

“What?” El asked.

Hop pulled the bracelet off his wrist, the one that had been there for nearly six years, since Sarah passed away. He felt naked without it, but he knew it was in good hands as he slipped the old hair ribbons onto El’s wrist and tightened it.

“Pretty,” El said, touching it carefully. He had never told her what the bracelet meant but clearly she had some guess.

“They were Sarah’s,” Hop explained.

“Your girl’s,” El finished for him. “You won’t miss them?”

“Sure I will,” Hop said. “But a big night like this? I figure my daughter ought to have them.”

“Your daughter?” El asked. Hop chuckled.

“Yeah, my daughter. You’re my girl, too, kid.”

El leaned over the cab to hug Hop around the middle. Hop held her for a moment, kissing the top of her head. “Thanks, Dad,” She said, her voice muffled by his chest. Hop gave a bittersweet laugh. He never thought he would hear that again, but it felt right.

“Yeah, yeah,” He said, before he could impair his masculine image by crying outside of a middle school dance. “Go have fun.”